

## Teens get a glimpse of Juvenile Hall life

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### Students on tour say they're struck by lack of privacy

**By Ray Huard**  
STAFF WRITER

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The commands are barked in a clear and loud voice with just a hint of menace.

“Tuck in your shirts,” says Jenifer Miskulin, a deputy probation officer.

“Cross your arms” Miskulin says sternly. “No talking, let's go, let's go.

Glancing at the low-riding baggy pants of a teenage boy, she tells him to pull up his trousers and straighten up.

He does it quickly. Those behind him fall into a double line.

Gone are the jostling and joking that had happened moments before.

Miskulin later said the harsh tone and strong words were meant to make an impression on the nearly 3,000 teenagers and parents who yesterday toured the Kearny Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility – commonly called Juvenile Hall – and the adjacent Juvenile Court during an annual open house.

The impression stuck with 14-year-old Raquel Diaz of Escondido and her stepbrother, Jamie Diaz, 15.

“I won't come here,” Jamie said.

What struck him was the starkness of the cells – that and the isolation of those placed in solitary confinement.

“There's nothing in there, just the room and the beds,” Jamie said. “I'd go crazy.”

Raquel said she was stunned by the common bathrooms.

“You don't have any privacy,” she said.

Their parents, like many of the others taking the tour, said they brought their children to learn what happens when children break the law.

“We wanted our children to get a little eye-opener,” Leticia Lopez said.

The county Probation Department has been offering the tours for nearly 20 years, but the number of people taking them has nearly doubled since 2001, topping 3,200 in 2004.

Juvenile Hall was built in 1954, and currently houses 330 boys and girls.

Derryl Acosta, a Probation Department spokesman, said those sent to Juvenile Hall stay about 18 days on average before they are released or transferred elsewhere to serve their sentence.

"It's kind of bad in there," said Patrick Brown, 11, of Rancho San Diego.

"They watch you while you take a shower. There's no privacy. I don't want to end up like that."

Patrick's mother, Debbie Brown, said she left with a feeling of sadness for the children housed in Juvenile Hall.

"They're so isolated from their family, they're really in like a mini-prison," Brown said.

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